

# FRIUL: ITALY'S WHITE WINE HEAVEN

F R I A U L  
S P O N S O R E D P R O F I L E



Friulano - a grape varietal, once known as Tocai Friulano is currently being given a great deal of attention. Winegrowers want to take advantage of this! „Soil driven“ as no other of its kind. Friulano is commonly found in almost all regions of Friuli. Depending on the type of soil, it generates different styles of wine, all of profound richness, writes Dr. Steffen Maus.

*„2006 is an outstanding vintage,  
perhaps the best seen in Friuli  
in the last ten years.“*

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FRIUL  
SPONSORED PROFILE

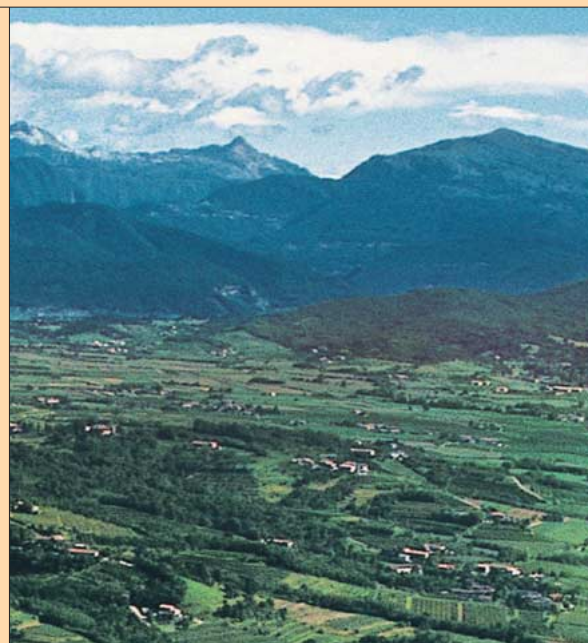
The name „Tocai Friulano“ has been shortened to „Friulano“. Not only is it easier to pronounce, it is clearly associated with its region of cultivation. The new name for this historic vine provides both winegrowers and trade with an easily identifiable pseudonym. Friulano, which is successfully cultivated in almost all regions of Friuli produces unique wines: polished whites of pure, soft, yet fresh aromas, smooth textures and alluring flavours.

Throughout Friuli, but in particular in the wine growing areas of Cormons, Capriva and Pordenone, vintners are adjusting slowly but steadily to the new name. As one of Friuli's most important indigenous grape varieties let us take a look at its character and relate this to the winemakers' experience.

It is only a few weeks since north-eastern Italy's harvest came to an end. As fermentation gases evaporate and the juice bubbles away in the tanks, Friuli's winemakers all agree that 2006 is truly an outstanding vintage. Roberto Felluga goes as far as saying that it is the best vintage seen in Friuli in the last ten years. The ripening season was stable, with sunny days, cool nights and little or no rain during most of October. Everyone harvested healthy grapes, factors which ensure an excellent vintage. An excellent note on which the new Friulano - once Tocai Friulano - will make its debut next spring, in the upcoming wine fairs and trade events.

A brief retrospective at a glance shows that over the past years the much-debated topic of Tokay and Tocai has been regularly discussed by the Italian media. Many of the comments and discussions were accused of lacking objectivity, more than

# FRIULANO IS THE TALK OF FRIULI



often blaming Italian politicians for mishandling the issue. Many producers clinged to the vague possibility that a last minute change of name could be prevented. An unlikely possibility, especially as the change of name from Tocai Friulano to Friulano had been agreed upon back in 1993. The request had been submitted to the European Union by the Hungarian wine industry as part of legislation to





welcome the change, which in their opinion was too slow in coming. While the most outgoing producers already began labelling vintage 2005 with the new Friulano, economic concerns regarding the marketing of this new name have been replaced by an overall confidence. The association of winegrowers as well as the various local consortiums have taken advantage of this opportunity by promoting the local varietal more aggressively, both nationally and internationally. Thanks to the publicity generated by the name change - and the rising quality of the wines - the new Friulano is enjoying a great deal of unprecedented attention from both consumers and trade.

„The Friuli style“ is best represented by the taste of the local Friulano, a varietal, which according to its winemakers and connoisseurs best expresses the character of the region and is enjoyed as an integral part of the local people’s daily lifestyle - much as they enjoy their daily espresso.

#### Vineyards, wines, styles

Friulano is indigenous to the region’s producers and hence identifiable. According to winemaker Edi Keber, „Compared to other international varietals,

such as Sauvignon Blanc, Friulano produces good results almost every vintage.“ Not surprisingly, more than half of his estate is planted to Friulano. Since 2002, recent vintages have been quite different in style and this regularity in quality produced by Friulano is an important factor, asserting its adaptability to the region. Friulano, if not adequately tamed by proper trellising, pruning and thinning tends to be a high yielding varietal. Furthermore, in the weeks that precede the harvest the plant is prone to botrytis, hence proper vineyard management is essential to maintain a healthy fruit. Some 15 years ago because of these issues, the trend was to replace Friulano with Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio. Today producers are far more aware of these issues and more importantly, able to deal with them.

With more than 5,000 hectares of vineyard surface, the region has sufficient quantity to meet market demands. According to Andrea Magnas, producer in Isonzo, „For most winegrowers today, Friulano is no longer the insignificant, everyday white wine. More attention is paid to vineyard management and curtailing yields, which are significantly

protect the name of its origin and local appellation. Subsequently, after much debate, Italy was granted a lengthy period of transition ending in March 2007, when the new legislation will become effective, replacing Tocai Friulano with Friulano.

No transition is ever easy and it is a fact that some producers mourn the loss of a familiar name which has been ever present in its local viticulture. Others



*above left: Friuli enjoys a stunning setting, wedged between the Alps and the lagoons of Venice*

*above right: Those producers fermenting in stainless steel want to enhance Friulano’s attractive floral, fragrant qualities*

*left: Depending on the type of soil, Friulano generates different styles of wine, all of profound richness*

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lower.“ Furthermore, vinification and cellar trends have led to the coexistence of two exciting, yet rather different styles of production.

### Two winemaking philosophies

During the initial fermentation period, winemakers split into two schools of thought supporting different philosophies. Those in favour of a longer maceration, on the one hand, and those who opt for a reductive approach, with limited ingress of oxygen. Supporters of the reductive approach argue that barrel fermentation and ageing in oak tends to change the character of the grape variety, thus eliminating its attractive floral, fragrant quality. The other school would argue that extended lees contact impedes oxidation and insures the wine a longer bottle life. It is not unusual to discover that those wines produced in this style often, after bottling in spring, appear rather one dimensional in flavour, yet after the following summer disclose their true nature, showing the typical aromas of acacia blossoms and pears.

„Friulano has an undoubtedly masculine personality. At the same time it is both elegant and delicately textured,“ explains Damian Princic of Calle Daga. Estates

such as Radikon or La Castellada allow the lees to remain up to a month on the skins, resulting in wines of intense colour with a dense structure and a fine oxidative touch of rich fruit and roasted nuts. Extremists such as Radikon and the Greek Pavechlos have proven that it is possible to vinify without the addition of sulphur if the combination between alcohol, phenols, acids and other ingredients are well balanced and in harmony.

### Longevity and mineral Character

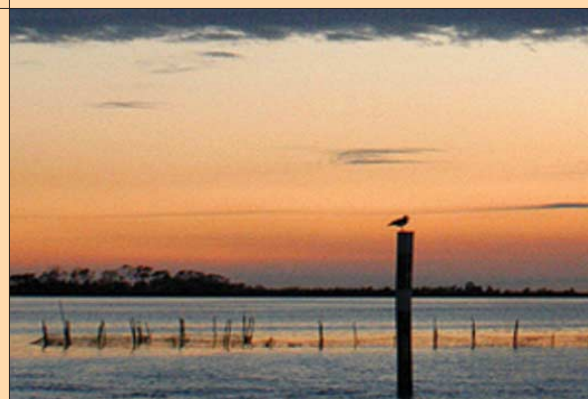
Friulano, independent of its reductive or oxidative style, shows excellent longevity. This is well-proven by Edi Keber and Renato Keber, in particular with mature whites from the 1990s. These wines originate from vineyards that are planted less than 200 metres apart and yet, they represent the two opposite poles of winemaking. With lower yields, and good bottle ageing, Friulano has an even better chance than many other white wine varieties in Italy of scoring high points.

„In comparison to white wines from the south of Italy, ours have the advantage of being planted to rich mineral soils and enjoying a very particular microclimate,“ stresses Stefano Trinco, President of the Federoc Association Friuli.

**F**riulano grows well in the areas of Cormons, Capriva and Pordenone. Although it has many facets, there is a common element to be found in all the wines. Indigenous as it is, Friulano is planted throughout the region, covering more than 5,000 hectares. Since the critical mass is present, this volume allows the varietal to be exported, a feature that most other indigenous varieties lack. Apart from the tiny region of Carso, located in the proximity of Trieste, Friulano is the leading varieties found in all the DOC appellations of Friuli. “Friulano is easily identifiable throughout the different vineyards of the Friuli,“ explains Stefano Trinco, who makes wine for a well-known estate in Grave.

What are the differences from region to region? With 5,000 hectares, the region of Grave is by far the largest DOC in Friuli. It extends to the west and south of Udine across the fertile valleys of the rivers Isonzo and Tagliamento. This area is renowned for its fresh, fruity white wines, while the warmer loamy soils are more suitable for the cultivation of red wine. Friulano is in demand as well in higher quantities from the bigger export oriented companies such as Plozner, Di Leonard and Cabert as from many of the smaller quality oriented companies. Positive market signals are also fostering a buoyant trend in the nearby areas of Aquileia, Annia and Latisana.

Considered by all as the most typical white wine variety of the region, Friulano is the natural partner for the local red Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso, which is also an important variety historically rooted in the area of Aquileia. The wine regions located near the coast have always been considered of average quality. Today they are seen as zones of emerging quality and are gaining considerable significance thanks to a growing number of quality





oriented estates such as Foffani, Ca' Bolani and Mulino delle Tolle.

The neighbouring region, which extends from the coast up to the Collio area, boasts a reputation for quality driven wines. During the First World War, this area, which takes its name from the river Isonzo, was a major site of combat, where hundreds of thousands of Australian and Italian soldiers lost their lives. Over the past years soil surveys have been carried out classifying the terrain under two subzones. Friulano plays a key role in both the alluvial soils of the northern Rive Alte and the loamier, sandy soils the Rive di Giare in the south.

The two remaining hilly areas of Collio and Colli Orientali del Friuli are home to a number of excellent producers. In the area of Cormons within the Collio zone, there are more than 30 estates, all of which are commended in the main Italian wine guides. Similarly there are as many quality driven estates in Capriva del Friuli, central to the production of the Colli Orientali. Both areas are characterized by a gentle hilly landscape offering magnificent views. The Collio area was the first to receive DOC status in 1968. This area extends southwards along the Slovenian border as far as the towns

## REGIONAL PROFILES

Cormons and Gorzia in the South. In the west the Colli Orientali area extends across the hilly chain in the north up to Nimis, near Tarcento where the small Romandolo DOCG is located.

In addition to Friulano the local varieties in the Collio area include Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. These varieties are likewise cultivated in the Colli Orientali along with small quantities of the local red varieties such as Pignolo and Schiopettino.

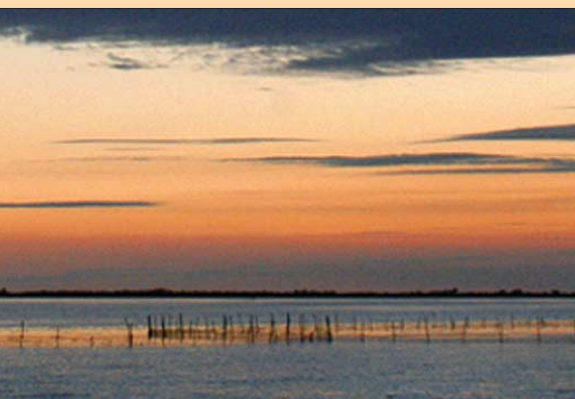
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### *Friuli's strong points*

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The region boasts a number of excellent producers and estates with vineyards averaging some 7 to 10 hectares, producing less than 50.000 bottles. Wines from these estates sell between 7 and 8 Euro. The price reflects the quality of their wines. Larger estates sell their Friulano for between 3.50 and 9 Euro.

„Throughout Friuli's wine regions, starting with the wide Friuli Grave in the west, across the hilly Collio and Colli Orientali Friuli, to the Isonzo area and the regions of Latisana and Aquileia, close to the Adriatic coast, one can find a myriad of interesting small and middle-sized estates which offer well-priced, high quality wines – never short of a



*above left: If yields are kept low, Friulano produces rich wines of surprising longevity*

*above right: Numerous medieval towns along the rivers invite tourists to linger over a glass of wine*

*left: Sunset over the lagoons of Venice is a marvelous sight*

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good story," says Michele Bertolami, director of the Federoc Association in Friuli. A reliable source for new discoveries is the independent wine guide published annually in three languages by Friuli's Chamber of Commerce.

### *An interesting market*

A trend in increased demand for local grape varieties greatly pleases Friuli's winemakers. „A few years back the market did nothing but talk about local varieties, but continued buying international ones such as Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc“, says Massimo Zorzettig of La Tunella estate. This trend can be noted especially in Italy's national market, where demand for local varieties has increased. This is of particular importance as it sets the trend for the export markets. Export oriented estates welcome the change of name from Tocai Friulano to Friulano as this is thought to simplify communication abroad and likewise triggers a certain amount of curiosity. „Abroad many consumers mistake Friuli's

white wines for Tokay from Hungary“, says Brigitte Zamo from Le Vigne di Zamo estate. A quick survey reveals that many foreign wine enthusiasts from non-European countries have no idea where the Collio or the Grave areas begin or end, not to mention their overall knowledge of where Friuli stands within Italy's wine market. The entire region produces about one million hectolitre of wine - a modest amount when compared to the 50 million produced by Italy as a whole.

Supporters of the new Friulano name argue that it is immediately identifiable as being local to the region. Its complexity and autonomous quality offer an alternative response to the standardization of wine. „Recently, at Prowein, Vinexpo and Vinitaly trade exhibitions it is clear to see that wine buyers are open minded and ready to experience something different,“ explains Michele Bertolami. Irrespective of the market: Germany, America or Asia, the trend is to search for wines that can be communicated relatively easily, without appearing trivial. Two criteria of

utmost importance are the character of the grape variety which must be easily understood as well as originating from a known region or producer. Friuli's white wines meet both criteria, as well as providing an interesting „story“.

### *Sales incentives*

It is not difficult to find some excellent food pairing to Friulano wines - especially in the range of Italian foods. In Friuli, producers tend to showcase their wines paired to the local San Daniele ham. The salty mineral quality of the wines is a perfect match the cured San Daniele ham. Not being a perishable food item, it can easily be packaged for export and is a useful sales promotion. This along with the range of high quality local cheeses, particularly the Montasio cheese - from cow's milk - also pairs exceptionally well to Friulano. Friuli's tourism also plays a very important role for its reputation and many producers invest considerably in wine tourism, confident that this will enhance their sales in the wine trade.





# AN UNIQUE TASTE

**H**aving made a representative selection of Friulano wines that demonstrate the common characteristics of its aromas, a survey was carried out asking Friuli's producers to characterise the quality of Friulano. The profile of aromas range from acacia, pear, meadow flowers, apricot, anise and fennel to the classic „mandorlato“ - a pleasant, dry almond after taste.

These tasting impressions should not be mistaken with 'bitterness', being the result of having harvested unripe grapes. The timing of the harvest and the quality of the vintage determines its fruity character, while the degree of acidity can vary between 4,5 and 6,5 parts per thou-

sand - depending on the production philosophy and the soil structure. The distinction varies from fruity white wines for everyday consumption, cultivated on the valley floors - and 'ambitious' wines deriving from hilly vineyard sites producing wines that are often, in part, barrel fermented and aged in wood. In areas such as Collio and the Colli Orientali del Friuli it is the high amount of stone in the soil that produces rich, complex age-worthy wines. Producers from these areas define their production in terms of quality-oriented, low yielding wines. An overall unique minerality is a key element, characteristic of Friulano, which stands out among other Italian white wines.



*above left: While many wine producers still mature their white wines in large casks, the smaller oak barrels are generally reserved for the reds*

*above right: The high amount of stone in the soil of some vineyards produce rich, complex, age-worthy wines*

*left: The finest vineyards are generally found on the slopes around the hilltop villages*

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F R I A U L  
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Over the past years Friuli's wine body and its local politics have been instrumental in developing and improving in quality of its wines. Approximately 15 million Euro has recently been granted by the ministry of agriculture in Rome as an incentive to invest in the continuing quality of Friuli Venezia Giulia's viticulture. Paired with the dynamics of a young generation of winemakers, the future looks bright for the region.

# RECOMMENDED WINES OF THE VARIOUS REGIONS OF FRIULI



### DOCs and DOCGs:

Carso DOC  
Colli Orientali del Friuli DOC  
Collio Goriziano DOC  
Friuli-Annia DOC  
Friuli-Aquileia DOC  
Friuli-Grave DOC  
Friuli-Isonzo DOC  
Friuli-Latisana DOC  
Lison-Pramaggiore DOC  
Ramandolo DOCG  
Picolit DOCG

### Vineyard area:

15,400 hectares  
9,000 hectares white  
6,400 hectares red

More than 60 percent of the production are classified as DOC or DOCG

### Autochthon varieties:

#### WHITE:

Tocai Friulano  
Ribolla Gialla  
Verduzzo friulano  
Picolit  
Vitovska  
Malvasia

#### RED:

Refosco (dal Peduncolo rosso)  
Schiopetto (Ribolla Nera)  
Pignolo  
Tazzelenghe  
Terrano

WINE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL DOSSIER  
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